

# The EASY Program

## The High Cost of Sleep Deprivation

Articles about famous people often mention that they sleep as little as four hours each night. Margaret Thatcher and Martha Stewart do it. Florence Nightingale and Thomas Edison did it. But it's still not a good idea for most people. In fact, regularly getting four hours of sleep can result in a level of dysfunction similar to being intoxicated.

The following are just some of the problems associated with sleep deprivation:

- Irritability
- Slowed reactions
- Decreased concentration
- Decreased brain activity
- Faster aging
- Anxiety
- Increased susceptibility to illness
- Weight gain
- Blurred vision
- Memory deficits
- Impaired judgment
- Impatience
- Confusion
- Headaches
- Decreased coordination
- Impaired learning

In addition, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), driver fatigue is responsible for over 100,000 car accidents each year.



### Are You Getting Enough Sleep?

The Epworth Sleepiness Scale (developed by Dr. Murray Johns, Epworth Hospital, Melbourne, Australia) can help you evaluate your fatigue level. For each of the following situations, rate your likelihood of dozing or sleeping (0 = would never doze or sleep; 1 = slight chance of dozing or sleeping; 2 = moderate chance; 3 = high chance):

1. Sitting and reading \_\_\_\_
2. Watching TV \_\_\_\_
3. Sitting inactive in a public place \_\_\_\_
4. Being a passenger in a motor vehicle for an hour or more \_\_\_\_
5. Lying down in the afternoon \_\_\_\_
6. Sitting and talking to someone \_\_\_\_
7. Sitting quietly after lunch (no alcohol) \_\_\_\_
8. Stopped for a few minutes in traffic while driving \_\_\_\_

*(continued on next page)*

**We Can Help.**

**800-223-7723**

**or visit**

**AnthemEAP.com**

If your total score is 9 or over, you're not getting enough sleep.

### **Sleep and Teenagers**

Sleep deprivation is a particularly thorny issue for teens, since chemical changes in their bodies make it difficult for them to wake up in the morning—yet their classes start as early as 7:15 a.m. The result can be tardiness, disciplinary problems, and/or impaired learning. Most frighteningly, the NHTSA reports that young drivers are involved in more than half of the 100,000 fatigue-related accidents each year.

### **What Can You Do?**

The first step is to leave enough time to sleep. It's very tempting to grab extra hours to finish work, watch TV, and do homework, but getting the right amount of sleep can make you more productive and help you to live longer.

### **If You Have Trouble Sleeping**

If you leave enough time but still can't enough sleep, here are some steps you can take:

- Get up and go to bed the same time every day (including weekends)
- Avoid napping
- Exercise regularly, but not within four hours of bedtime
- Use your bed only for sleeping
- Avoid caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol four to six hours before bed
- Have a light snack before bedtime
- Try to be in sunlight when you wake up to set your biological clock

You may find the following websites helpful for further information: Sleep Foundation ([www.sleepfoundation.org](http://www.sleepfoundation.org)) and Sleep Net ([www.sleepnet.com](http://www.sleepnet.com)).

© Harris, Rothenberg International, LLC



## **Teen Dating: What Parents Should Know**

Beginning to date is an important step, and dating can teach responsibility, trust, and decision-making. Here are some ways to make your teen's growing social life smoother for both of you.

### **Opening the Lines of Communication**

Many parents lay down some ground rules when they first discuss dating with their teens. This conversation can also be an opportunity to let your teen know that you're open to further discussion.

- Always give a reason for a rule. Teens are developing their analytical skills and resent being given orders without knowing why.
- Let your child know that you will reconsider the rules as he or she matures.
- Ask for input and really listen so that your teen feels respected.

(continued on next page)

- Make it clear that there's no punishment for asking questions. Keep communication open on all types of topics including relationships and intimacy. Your EAP can help with resources and support on communicating with teens about important—and sometimes delicate—topics.
- Explain the pros and cons of more serious relationships. You may choose to relate a story from your past and explain how you felt. Ask your teen how he or she would handle a similar situation and its outcome.

Don't be put off if your teen wants to negotiate certain rules with you. However, if your teen violates a rule you both agreed on, make sure there is a consequence. This approach will reinforce that your teen is responsible for his or her actions. While it is also important to define which rules are absolutely non-negotiable, do so sensitively.

### Getting to Know Your Teen's Date

Make it a rule that your teen introduce all new dates to you before going out. First impressions can be misleading, but how this person behaves toward you can be a good indicator of how he or she will act with your teen.

If your teen begins seeing someone more seriously, it's important that you get to know this person better. Invite him or her over for dinner. You can ask more probing questions, but be careful about their wording. Pay attention to nonverbal behavior. Is the person polite at the table? Does he look at you when speaking? Does she seem respectful toward your child?

You may be concerned that your child's relationship is getting too serious. Exclusivity is not necessarily bad, but it can be a problem if your teen starts neglecting other friends and/or important activities. If you feel your teen cannot handle an exclusive relationship at this time, you may want to limit the number of nights per week he or she can date.

### Recognizing an Abusive Relationship

Abuse can occur in relationships at any age. If you feel your son or daughter is involved in a physically,



emotionally, or verbally abusive relationship, you need to step in. Signs of abuse include the following:

- Bruises, injuries, and/or frequent “accidents”
- Abrupt changes in behavior or attitude
- Secrecy
- Isolation from important friends or activities
- A sudden drop in self-esteem
- Dramatic weight loss or gain
- Lower grades
- Increased school absences

Bringing up the subject of abuse with your teen requires extreme sensitivity. A good way to broach the subject is to ask your teen “hypothetically” what he or she would do if a good friend was involved in an abusive situation. This will help your teen to think about the situation and may even lead to a discussion with you.

### The Safety Net

Perhaps the most important thing you need to convey to your teen about dating—and any other issue—is that you will be there if he or she gets into an unsafe or uncomfortable situation. If your daughter sneaks out to a party and drinks too much, you don't want her to think she can't call you for a ride home because you'll be too angry. Express to your teen that during dangerous situations, rule-breaking is of secondary importance to safety.

## Parents Versus Grandparents: Finding the Happy Medium

The relationship between parent and child is frequently a rocky one. As the child grows into adulthood, however, things can settle down.

Then along comes a grandchild . . . and everything becomes unsettled again! Whether you're the parent or the grandparent, compromise is necessary when it comes to the new generation.

### If You're the Grandparent

Chances are that you don't have to force your grandchildren to eat vegetables or do homework. You can be there for fun, and the kids will love you for it. However, you still have to . . .

#### Follow the Rules!

Whether you're a free-spirit granny or a straight-arrow grandpa, you have to work with your adult child (or son/daughter-in-law). You may not agree with your child's methods of parenting—a lot has changed over the years—but you have to accept that the parent is in charge, not you.

Communication is key.

Ask questions such as "What's the latest he can go to bed?" and "Is it okay to take her to see that new film?" Respecting the parent's authority will keep you in his or her good graces, and may help make your grandchild feel more comfortable as well. Always know the rules before you're left in charge. If you think the rules are unreasonable, then communicate, negotiate, and do your best.

### If You're the Parent

#### Set the Rules and Let Go!

You work hard to set boundaries and rules for your child, and then some of them are thrown out the window at grandma's house. How do you deal with that?

Set priorities.

Will it really hurt your child if he stays up too late on occasion? Will your child be spoiled if she receives too many presents? Pick your battles carefully, drawing the line only when you feel a boundary must be respected.

Of course, if for any reason you think a grandparent is physically or mentally unable to take care of your child, do not leave the child alone with him or her. Your decision may hurt the grandparent's feelings, but it is still your decision to make.

#### Talk to Your Children.

Even before your children are old enough to fully understand, start explaining that things happen differently at the grandparents'. For instance: "Honey, even though you eat a lot of candy at grandma's house, that's not the way we do it at home. Enjoy the candy, and remember that it's a special treat that only happens at grandma's."

#### Give Your Parents (or In-Laws) a Chance.

Grandchildren can bring out the best in people. Try to let go of any leftover bad feelings you may have from your own childhood; this is not the time for revenge. Keeping grandparents from seeing grandkids hurts the grandkids as much as the grandparents. Give your children the gift of more people to love them—especially their grandparents.

© Harris, Rothenberg International, LLC